Mr. Chairman,

As this is the first time my Delegation is taking the floor in this Committee, allow me to extend my congratulations on your election to preside over this important Committee and to commend the exemplary manner on the way you are conducting our proceedings.

Malta is pleased to participate once again in this important annual general debate on "Regional Disarmament and Security". As in previous years, my intervention will focus primarily on the efforts undertaken by Malta and neighbouring States to strengthen security and cooperation in the Mediterranean.

As a European country at the crossroads of the Mediterranean, it is only natural for Malta to place Euro-Mediterranean affairs as a central pillar of its foreign policy. Malta’s geo-strategic location makes us intimately aware of the intrinsic relationship between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. Malta has been an active member in all regional fora concerning the Mediterranean and has remained unfailingly dedicated to the Mediterranean region. All along we have been driven by the overriding objective of permeating deeper into the grassroots level and ensuring that the benefits of such an endeavour touch the daily lives of our citizens. Malta’s major strategic objective is to continue to play a proactive role in the promotion of peace, stability and prosperity in the Mediterranean through different confidence and security-building initiatives that advance dialogue and understanding in our region.

Mr. Chairman,

In November of last year, Malta hosted the First Regional Conference for the Mediterranean of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations. The priorities identified in the Regional Strategy for the Mediterranean, adopted during the Malta Conference, addressed precisely those issues that only a few months later were to lie at the heart of an unprecedented turn of events in North Africa and the Middle East. The priorities identified by the Conference outlined a clear vision aimed at improving the political and socio-economic situation in the region. The adoption of the Strategy for the Mediterranean laid the grounds for what Malta believes should now be translated to a tangible response to a revived spirit of democracy and good governance that has engulfed the region. The Strategy’s intrinsic value lies in that it was devised in a meeting where civilizations converged, and in defiance of the tensions that still prevail in the Mediterranean region. The reverberations of the Arab Spring and the hopes we all share for prosperity and mutual understanding in our region
will no doubt continue to guide the determination and aspirations of the peoples to follow-up on the Strategy in a unified and dignified way.

The Arab Spring, especially the developments in Libya, saw Malta taking a strategic role as a logistical and transit base for evacuation operations with over 17,000 persons being repatriated through Malta. The humanitarian hub set up in Malta during the first days of the crisis, continues today to assist, streamline, facilitate and simplify procedures for IGO and NGOs in coordinating humanitarian aid to Libya through Malta. Malta’s pivotal link in support of the relief efforts being undertaken include the operation of flights by UN Humanitarian Air Services as well as by, among others, the ICRC, IOM, WHO and WFP, besides individual states.

Mr. Chairman

In July 2011, Malta joined 51 countries in the EU-sponsored Seminar to promote confidence-building and in support of a process aimed at establishing a zone free of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East. In this context, Malta augurs that this successful event continues a step-by-step approach in achieving this objective which would in turn contribute to the enhancement of the security of each and every country in the region with a focus on nuclear weapons, biological weapons and chemical weapons and missiles.

Another important event held in the past twelve months was the Annual OSCE Mediterranean Conference held in Montenegro between the 10th-11th October 2011 brought together OSCE participating States and the Partners for Co-operation with special focus on ways to support these OSCE Partner Countries in the Southern Mediterranean. The main matters discussed were policing and the role of the armed forces in democratic societies, promoting human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, electoral reform and good governance. The OSCE offered to share its experience gained by supporting democratic processes in its own Participating States with those Partners interested.

Mr. Chairman

The European Commission-League of Arab States Liaison Office, established in Malta exactly two years ago, has, among its priorities, the identification of projects that contribute to on-going confidence-building measures, crisis response and early warning systems, as well as others that address economic and environmental security concerns. Malta’s hope is that all Parties will be able to recognize the importance of this platform for inter-regional engagement and dialogue on strategic issues of interest to both Organizations in their interests to strengthen understanding and cooperation among their Member States.

Malta actively supports the role of Parliamentarians in advancing the aspirations of the people in the Mediterranean and even beyond. In this respect, Malta is honoured to be the host of the Headquarters of the Parliament Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM), which brings together Members of Parliaments from all countries bordering the Mediterranean on an equal footing under a unique forum of their own, to examine questions and take decisions on issues of direct interest to the countries of the region. The 6th Plenary Session of the PAM to be held in Palermo, Italy from the 27th to 30th October 2011, will be yet another occasion where Parliamentarians from the Mediterranean littoral will have the opportunity to engage in injecting initiatives, ideas, proposals and possible solutions aimed at using parliamentary diplomacy to enhance peace, security and cooperation in the Mediterranean region.

The Union for the Mediterranean and the European Neighbourhood Policy are another two processes which continue to generate the much need political dialogue that have a direct bearing on strengthening securing and co-operation in the Mediterranean. In this context, Malta supports efforts by the UfM in its focus on the implementation of feasible projects which will achieve concrete results in the broader context of North-South co-ownership of the UfM. The organization by the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies of the University of Malta of the Euro-Med Information and Training Seminar next month is yet another example towards the shaping of a
culture of dialogue and cooperation among the EU Member States and their Mediterranean Partners.

The launching in June 2011 of the Malta-based European Asylum Support Office is yet another important initiative which will streamline asylum policies in EU Member States and improving co-operation between authorities. Indeed, it is recognized that the increasing phenomenon of illegal immigration requires a coordinated effort by all Mediterranean. Over the last decade Malta has become a country of destination attracting an influx of illegal immigrants and asylum seekers. Malta provides international protection and asylum recognition to over 50% of applicants, a disproportionate high number when considering Malta’s geographic and demographic characteristics. While Malta affirms its commitment to abide by its international obligations, at the same time we reiterate our calls to the international community to continue to assist us in the resettlement process of these unfortunate people.

In its continuing vocation of seeking further initiatives to strengthen cooperation in the Mediterranean, also at the sub-regional level, the Government of Malta intends to host in the first half of next year, the Second Summit of the Western Mediterranean Forum also known as the 5+5 Dialogue. Malta strongly feels that this Dialogue is another building block as well as a valid contribution to the new realities that are emerging in the Mediterranean region and which have a direct impact on the lives of all the peoples in the Mediterranean.

Mr. Chairman,

The strengthening of the inter-linkage which exists between security in Europe and security in the Mediterranean is the primordial motive behind Malta’s support and endorsement of initiatives that provide the necessary impetus to the political, economic and social development dimensions in the Mediterranean.

It is widely recognized that the political and security implications of the situation in the Middle East have a direct impact on developments in the Mediterranean region and beyond. It is Malta’s hope that direct negotiations will resume between the Israelis and Palestinians to build confidence and trust on both sides. At the same time, we continue to support efforts in the realization of a two-State solution with an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel.

Mr. Chairman,

Malta intends to continue to build, together with other UN Member States, especially those of the Mediterranean littoral, on the achievements made so far by enhancing dialogue between and among countries in the Mediterranean region. Malta will also continue to participate actively in efforts by all stakeholders to strengthen the various Mediterranean and Euro-Mediterranean inter-governmental and parliamentary fora. By once again co-sponsoring the draft resolution on “Strengthening of security and cooperation in the Mediterranean” and urging all Member States to approve this resolution without a vote, Malta wants to reiterate its conviction that security in the Mediterranean is closely linked to European security as well as to international peace and security. In expressing our appreciation to the Delegation of Algeria for drafting this resolution, it is the fervent hope of my Delegation that the provisions contained in this resolution are fully implemented.

Thank you.